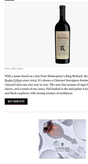

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FOOD & DRINK / WINE

NOVEMBER 7, 2025

The 50 Greatest Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignons of the 21st Century (So Far)

Counting down the king of red grapes.

By MIKE DESIMONE AND JEFF JENSSEN

Robb Report
50
GREATEST
NAPA VALLEY
CABERNET SAUVIGNONS

With a winemaking history stretching back to 1839, Napa Valley has been heralded as the source of some of the world's best Cabernet Sauvignon since 1976, when Stag's Leap Wine Cellars 1973 Cabernet Sauvignon received the highest rating in a comparative tasting between French and American wines. Napa Valley's reputation has grown exponentially in the intervening 49 years, as have the number of wineries there and the overall quality of the wines.

America's most famous wine producing region is now home to almost 500 wineries, a vast jump from the year it first gained international acclaim, when there were only around 50. The 21st century has been a boon for Napa Valley, with the number of highly rated or exceptional vintages far outpacing poor or even average seasons. Although just about any grape you can think of is grown and made into wine in Napa Valley, more than 50 percent of its vineyards are devoted to Cabernet Sauvignon, making it by far the most important crop and the most popular wine made there.

We have been visiting the valley for more than 25 years and have been writing about wine professionally for almost two decades, and fortunately we are both avid note takers. While we have a stash of old notebooks and tasting booklets from visits over the years, when we began working on our book *Wines of California*, which was released in 2014, we both switched to taking notes on our laptops and phones, leaving a digital record. At that time many wineries opened their cellars for us then, offering us the opportunity to taste not just their current vintage but back vintages as well, which gave us unique insight into the ageability and evolution of some of Napa Valley's finest bottles of Cab. In addition to some of the renowned names that brought recognition and accolades to the region in the last quarter of the 20th century, many of the newer entries have quickly made a name for themselves with the right combination of fruit sourcing and winemaking talent.

The best thing about this list is that almost every single wine on here, even the oldest vintages, should still be drinking well. The second-best thing is that all of the more recent vintages still have years of life left in them and can be opened in a decade or two. We took many elements into consideration when making our choices, and the most important is taste, but how a wine actually "tastes" involves a variety of impressions, including flavor, texture, tannins, acidity, and finish. Many were tasted blind in comparative tastings with similar wines, but some were enjoyed at professional tastings at wineries, at dinner with winemakers, or opened by friends. With that in mind, we have chosen the 50 Greatest Cabernet Sauvignons of the Century so far.

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50 To Kalon Vineyard Company 2019 HWC Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville

Photo : To Kalon Vineyard Company

The To Kalon Vineyard Company takes its name from the Greek words "To Kalon" which translate to "highest beauty." It was named by H.W. Crabb who planted vines and fruit trees here in the 1860s. Named for Henry Walker Crabb, 2019 HWC Cab is and has aromas of ripe red and black fruits punctuated by finely ground cinnamon and nutmeg with flavors of black cherry and black raspberry.

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49 Groth 2016 Oakville Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville

We first became familiar with Groth when we published our *Wines of California* book in 2014 and have continuously tasted the wines since then. One of the standout vintages for both of us was the 2016 Oakville Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon. It had aromas of blueberry, black plum, and buttery pie crust with smooth tannins and flavors of ripe red cherry, dark chocolate, and a touch of blueberry preserves.

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48 Burgess 2021 Promiscua Cabernet Sauvignon

We all know what the word promiscuous means in daily life but in the vineyard the word means something completely different. It comes from the old Italian—and more likely Ancient Roman—technique of planting food crops and trees among the vines and trellising the grape vines over the branches of those trees. Whatever the intent, we think the 2021 Burgess Promiscua Cab is delicious. It has aromas of candied cherry, cigar box, and red raspberry that lead to flavors of blackberry, crushed violet petals, and red currant.

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47 Etude 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley

Photo : Etude

Winemaker John Priest has been making wine from Pinot Noir grapevines planted at Etude by Tony Soter in 1982, but he also makes superb wines made from Cabernet Sauvignon. His 2019 Cab has aromas of crushed violet petals, cassis, tobacco leaf, and cedar. On entry it has grippy tannins which act as a backbone for flavors of black plum, red currant, and dark chocolate.

BUY NOW $100

46 Honig Vineyard and Winery 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon

Photo : Honig Vineyard and Winery

Honig Vineyard and Winery is family owned, sustainable, and solar powered. We tasted the 2010 as a library release when we somewhat randomly visited as part of a friend's Napa Valley birthday scavenger hunt. It had lots of youthfulness and proffered aromas of ripe black fruits and dried savory herbs. Smooth tannins lead the way to flavors of black currant, red plum, and a touch of mocha in the finish.

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45 One Acre 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon Porchview Vineyard Oak Knoll

Photo : One Acre

This 100 percent Cabernet Sauvignon is made from grapes sourced from the Porchview parcel in Dave Becker's One Acre vineyard. Harvested in early October following an exceptional growing season and bottled in July 2021, it has enticing aromas of cassis, pencil lead, and black plum with smooth tannins and flavors of Oolong tea, black raspberry, and red currant.

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44 Realm Cellars 2021 the Bard

Photo : Realm Cellars

With a name based on a line from Shakespeare's King Richard, the Bard has been made by Realm Cellars since 2003. It's always a Cabernet Sauvignon dominant proprietary blend but vineyard sites can vary year to year. The 2021 has aromas of cigar box, saddle leather, red cherry, and a touch of star anise. Full bodied in the mid palate it has flavors of black plum and black raspberry with closing touches of earthiness.

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43 Peter Michael Winery 2012 Au Paridis Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville

Photo : Peter Michael Winery

The Peter Michael Winery has 1,200 acres of land but only 200 acres have been planted with vines. The vineyard sites vary from mountain slopes to the benchlands of Oakville, and the Au Paridis vineyard is located squarely in the Oakville AVA. Its name translated roughly to "heaven," this vineyard is planted at between 500 to 600 feet of altitude. The 2012 vintage stands out for its heavenly aromas of ripe red and black fruits that lead to bold flavors mellowed by soft tannins.

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42 Chimney Rock 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon Stag's Leap District

Photo : Chimney Rock

Stella and Hack Wilson purchased Chimney Rock estate in 1980; at that time, it was 180 acres including a golf course. The Terlato family partnered with the Wilsons in 2000, planted more Cabernet Sauvignon vines, and in 2004 took over sole management of the estate. Chimney Rock's 2021 Cab has aromas of black currant, red raspberry, and crushed violet petals with pleasantly grippy tannins and flavors of fennel frond, black raspberry, and a touch of finely ground black pepper in the finish.

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41 Hall 2006 Kathryn Hall Cabernet Sauvignon

Photo : Hall

Kathryn Hall is well known for serving as the U.S. Ambassador to Austria from 1997 to 2001 and returning to Napa Valley to purchase the old St. Helena Bergfeld Winery in 2003. Her 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon was certainly a standout in both of our minds when we tasted it in the early 2010s, offering aromas of dark chocolate, black raspberry, pencil lead, and tobacco leaf that opened to flavors of blackberry, violet, and brown baking spices.

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40 Robert Mondavi 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve

Photo : Robert Mondavi

Robert Mondavi began making wine at his own winery in 1966 and is considered by many to be one of the founding fathers of modern American winemaking as well as a Napa Valley legend. We tasted the estate's 2004 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, one of the best in the long list of excellent wines made by this venerable winery. Opened at the end of the century's first decade, this wine had aromas of red currant, mocha, and ripe plum with silky tannins and flavors of black raspberry, pencil lead, and cocoa powder.

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39 Baldacci Family Vineyards 2014 Brenda's Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon

Photo : Baldacci Family Vineyards

Named in honor of his mother Brenda, winemaker Michael Baldacci carefully selects only the best grapes to go into this stunning wine, which is aged in medium to heavy toasted French oak barrels to create texture and complexity. His 2014 embodied both of these elements with soft silky texture and layers upon layers of intricate flavors of ripe black fruits, toasted hazelnut, black olive tapenade, vanilla, and savory dried herbs.

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38 Rutledge & Vine 2019 CS Oakville

Photo : Rutledge & Vine

Rob Mondavi, Jr. is a fourth generation Napa Valley winemaker who has been in the business since he began working next to his father Michael Mondavi as a young child. Rutledge & Vine is his personal project with his wife Lydia, and we were lucky enough to taste all of his back vintages earlier this year. The 2018 really stood out for us and we feel it shows his prowess as a rock star winemaker. It had aromas of red raspberry, red currant, and black cherry with taught acidity, fine tannins, and flavors of red plum and cassis. We're only sorry we didn't save a bottle to taste at the 10-year mark.

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37 Inglenook 2016 Rubicon Rutherford